

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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R 112213Z JUN 75

FM AMEMBASSY QUITO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5915

INFO AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL

C O N F I D E N T I A L QUITO 4131

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, EC

SUBJ: GOE PLODS ALONG BUT PREPARES FOR SOME DOMESTIC DISCONTENT

REF: A. QUITO 3626; B. QUITO 2719

1. SUMMARY: RECENT CABINET SHIFTS DO NOT APPEAR TO SIGNAL ANY SIGNIFICANT CHANGES IN DIRECTION FOR GOE ON INTERNAL POLITICAL MATTERS. NEW MINISTER OF GOVERNMENT DURAN'S ABILITIES IN HIS NEW POST HAVE NOT YET BEEN TESTED. HE IS REPUTED TO BE FIRM AND AUTHORITARIAN BUT THERE ARE DOUBTS REGARDING THE FINESSE HE BRINGS TO A DELICATE POST. POLITICAL PARTIES ARE STILL INSIGNIFICANT FACTOR IN ECUADOREAN LIFE AND GOVERNMENT VIEW OF THEM AS MOTOR TO PROPEL AMBITIOUS PEOPLE TO POWER FOR PERSONAL INTEREST HAS NOT CHANGED. THE LINE MARKED OUT BY PRESIDENT RODRIGUEZ OF CONDUCTING A "TOLERANT DICTATORSHIP" WILL CONTINUE; EXCEPTIONS ARE LIKELY TO OCCUR IF THE OPPOSITION DOES NOT TAKE GOVERNMENT WARNINGS AGAINST EXCESSES SERIOUSLY OR IF DURAN LOSES HIS COOL. END SUMMARY.

2. CABINET AND MILITARY COMMAND CHANGES DESCRIBED IN REF A SEEM TO HAVE BEEN ACCEPTED BY THOSE DIRECTLY
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CONCERNED AND BY PUBLIC WITH LITTLE FUSS. THE NEW

MINISTER OF GOVERNMENT AND POLICE, GENERAL DURAN, WHO NOW HAS THE MOST IMPORTANT CABINET POST AND THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR MAINTAINING PUBLIC ORDER HAS INHERITED THE TASK OF ARTICULATING THE REGIMES' POSTURE VIS-A-VIS THE POLITICAL PARTIES AND THE GOALS OF THE GOVERNMENT (ALONG WITH THE PRESIDENT). HE HAS REAFFIRMED THE ADMINISTRATIONS'S INTENTION OF DEALING FIRMLY WITH THOSE WHO ATTACK THE PRESIDENT OR HIS CABINET MEMBERS EXCESSIVELY WHILE TOLERATING CRITICISM BASED ON FACT AND GIVEN IN CONSTRUCTIVE SENSE. HE HAS URGED THE PRESS TO VOICE OPENLY SUCH VIEWS AS LONG AS DONE WITH RESPONSIBILITY.

3. THERE IS SOME CONCERN THAT DURAN WILL NOT HAVE THE FINE TOUCH DEMONSTRATED BY HIS PREDECESSOR POVEDA. THIS CONCERN HAD ITS ORIGIN IN DURAN'S HEAVY HANDED TREATMENT OF A STUDENT STRIKE IN GUAYAQUIL IN THE SUMMER OF 1973. MINISTRY OF EDUCATION OFFICIALS HAVE VIEWED HIM AS ERRATIC AND AT TIMES EVEN IRRATIONAL, GIVEN TO ISSUING FLAT ORDERS, INSISTING ON THEIR EXECUTION AND INTOLERANT OF SUGGESTIONS OR DISCUSSION. HE HAS DIFFICULTY DEALING WITH PROFESSIONALS AND IS KNOWN TO HAVE EXPRESSED THE WISH THAT THE PEOPLE WITH WHOM HE WORKED BE MILITARIZED SO THAT THEY WOULD KNOW WHAT IT MEANS TO TAKE ORDERS. NEVERTHELESS, HIS MILITARY ASSOCIATES CONSIDER HIM A HARDWORKING, DILIGENT SOLDIER WHOSE MOST IMPORTANT ASSET WILL BE HIS CLOSE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE PRESIDENT AND, DESPITE GRUMBLINGS BY HIS FORMER SUBORDINATES IN MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, IT IS NOTEWORTHY THAT HE HELD DOWN THIS POLITICALLY SENSITIVE POST FOR ALMOST TWO YEARS WITH OUT ANY MAJOR BLOW-UPS ON THE UNIVERSITY SCENE. IN ANY EVENT, DURAN'S STYLE IS PERHAPS MORE SUITABLE TO HIS NEW POST AND THERE IS NO REASON TO BELIEVE THAT THIS CHANGE HAS DONE ANYTHING OTHER THAN TO STRENGTHEN THE PRESIDENT'S POSITION. DURAN PROMISES TO BE AN EVEN MORE FAITHFUL EXPOSITOR OF THE PRESIDENT'S VIEWS THAN HIS PREDECESSOR. THE QUESTION REMAINS WHETHER OR NOT HE HAS THE PERSONAL QUALITIES NECESSARY TO DEAL WITH THE MULTITUDE OF DELICATE PROBLEMS WHICH CONFRONT A MINISTER OF GOVERNMENT AND POLICE.

4. THE POLITICAL PARTIES' CRIES FOR A RETURN TO
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CONSTITUTIONALITY HAVE NOT BEEN MUTED BY THE CHANGES AND THE NATIONAL FEDERATION OF LAWYERS HAS AGAIN CRITICIZED THE REGIME FOR ITS FAILURE TO HONOR DUE PROCESS IN THE DETENTIONS OF CONSERVATIVE LEADER TRUJILLO AND FORMER OIL MINISTER ROBELLY AND IN ISSUING THE ORDER FOR THE ARREST OF COLUMNIST JULIO PRADB. THE RESPONSE OF THE GOVERNMENT WAS TO SENTENCE THE FORMER OIL MINISTER TO THREE YEARS IMPRISONMENT JUNE 9 FOR UNPERMITTED USES OF MINISTRY

FUNDS, AND THE SAME DAY DURAN, AT A PRESS CONFERENCE, STATED THAT THE POLICY OF THE GOVERNMENT WITH RESPECT TO THE IMPRISONMENT OF TRUJILLO AND THE ORDER FOR THE ARREST OF PRADO HAD NOT CHANGED.

5. THERE IS SOME FEELING THAT THE PRESIDENT MAY BE TIGHTENING RANKS AROUND HIM PREPARATORY FOR POSSIBLY DIFFICULT TIMES HE MAY SEE APPROACHING. THE RECENTLY IMPLEMENTED LAW BANNING THE IMPORTATION OF AUTOMOBILES FOR 3 MONTHS, THE TIGHTENING OF CREDIT TO FINANCE IMPORTS AVAILABLE THROUGH THE BANKING SYSTEM AND THE PROSPECT OF OTHER MEASURES TO CONTROL LUXURY IMPORTS STEMMING FROM DEPRESSED PRICES OF CRUDE AND INCREASING BALANCE OF PAYMENTS PROBLEMS, ARE PROBABLY ALL FACTORS IN THIS EQUATION.
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